

The Magic of the Dinner Table

Family meals are important! Doing something as simple as eating together as a family a few times each week can make your family smarter, stronger, healthier, and happier. Research has shown that family meals can help children achieve better grades, develop healthier eating habits, reduce stress, and stay away from high risk behaviors and habits. Perhaps more importantly, it is a golden opportunity to create close bonds and lifelong memories.



Try these easy ways to make family meals a pleasant part of your family routine.

- ✓ Set a regular family mealtime. Regular mealtimes give your child a better chance to eat a variety of foods to get the right amount to grow, stay healthy, and keep a healthy weight.
- ✓ Make it simple, make it quick. Spend less time in the kitchen and more time at the family table. Simple meals, even cold sandwiches, taste as good as meals that take more work. You can make any meal special if you all feel relaxed and if mealtime is filled with caring and laughter. Simplify- to take care of you too!
- ✓ Show that family meals are important. During mealtime, turn off the TV. Find another way to see favorite shows. Let the answering machine take your phone calls too. Have your family make calls before or after the meal hour.
- ✓ Eat around a table. It's easier to talk and listen to your family when you face each other. Eating side-by-side at the kitchen counter takes away eye contact.
- ✓ Enjoy meal talk. Make easy conversations – no nagging or complaining. Talk so everyone can be a “star” at dinner. Don’t take over. Your child will listen and learn by feeling included.
- ✓ Be realistic about mealtime. Try to sit down together. Keep meals from lasting too long. If kids get fussy, your family meal won’t be fun. Wait until everyone is done to be excused.

Helping with family meals makes your child feel important in your family. Plus you get more valuable time together. Even if your child doesn’t do tasks perfectly, they’re still learning. A few extra minutes for dinner may make a huge difference years down the road, so try to get them involved:

- Pick flowers for the table.
- Create paper place mats.
- Help with simple tasks, like tearing salad greens, or putting bread in a basket.
- Help with the table setting, or clearing and washing the table afterwards.
- Ice glasses or pour drinks, perhaps with your help.
- Ask “What would you like to do to help me?”